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WADE HAMPTON.

A TRIBUTE TO TRUE CHIVALRY.

VIRGINIA, January, 1866.

There was a gentleman of South Carolina, of high social position and ample estate, who, in 1861, came to take part in the war in Virginia, at the head of a "Legion" of six hundred men, infantry. This body of men, it is said, he had equipped from his own purse, as he had sent to England and purchased the artillery with which he was going to fight.

The "Legion" was composed of brave stuff, and officered by hard fighting gentlemen—the flower indeed of the great South Carolina race; a good stock. I believe it first "took the field" in earnest at the first battle of Manassas as an independent organization; belonging neither to Beauregard's "Army of the Potomac," nor to Johnston's "Army of Shenandoah." But there it was, as though dropped from the clouds, on the morning of the fiery 21st July, 1861, amid the corn fields of Manassas. It made its mark without loss of time—stretching out to Virginia that firm, brave hand of South Carolina. At 10 o'clock in the morning of this eventful day, the battle seemed lost to the Southerners. Evans was cut to pieces; Bee shattered and driven back in utter defeat, to the Henry House Mills between the victorious enemy, and Beauregard's unprotected flank were interposed only the six hundred men of the "Legion" already up, and the two thousand six hundred and eleven muskets of Jackson's not yet in position. The "Legion" occupied the Warrenton road near the Stone House, where it met and sustained with stubborn front the torrent dashed against it. Gen. Keys, with a whole division, attacked these six hundred men from the direction of Red House Ford, and his advance was forced back and compelled to take refuge beneath the bluffs near Stone Bridge. The column of General Hunter, meanwhile, closed in on the left of the little band, enveloped his flank, and poured a destructive artillery fire along the line. To hold their ground further was impossible, and they slowly fell back; but these precious moments had been secured. Jackson was in position; the "Legion" retreated, and formed upon his right; the enemy's advance was checked; and when the Southern line advanced in its turn, with wild cheers, piercing the Federal centre, the South Carolinians fought shoulder to shoulder beside the Stonewall Brigade, and saw the forces break in disorder. When the sun set on this bloody and victorious field, the "Legion" had made a record among the most honorable in history. They had done more than their part in the gigantic struggle, and now saw the enemy in full retreat, but their leader did not witness that spectacle. Wade Hampton had been shot down in the final charge near the Henry House, and borne from the field, cheering on to his men to the last, with that stubborn hardihood which he derived from his ancestral blood.

Such was the first appearance upon the great arena of a man who was destined to act a prominent part in the tragic drama of the war, and win for himself a celebrated name. At Manassas, there in the beginning of the struggle, as always afterward, he was the cool and fearless soldier. It was easily seen by those who watched Hampton "at work" that he fought from a sense of duty, and not from passion, or to win renown. The war was a gala day, full of attraction and excitement to some; with him it was hard work—not sought, but accepted. I am certain that he was not actuated by a thirst for military rank or renown. From those early days when all was so gay and brilliant, to the latter years when the conflict had become so desperate and bloody, oppressing every heart, Hampton remained the same cool, unexcited soldier. He was foremost in every fight, and everywhere did more than his duty, but eventually martial ambition did not move him. Driven to take up arms by his principles, he fought for his principles, not for fame. It followed him—he did not follow it; and to contemplate the and career of such a man is wholesome.

His long and arduous career cannot here be narrated. A bare reference to some prominent points is all that can be given. Col. Hampton, of the "Hampton Legion," soon became Brigadier-General Hampton of the cavalry. The horsemen of the Gulf States serving in Virginia, were placed under him, and the brigade became a portion of Stuart's command. It soon made its mark. Here are some of the landmarks in the stirring record:

The hard and stubborn stand made at the Catoctin mountain when General Lee first invaded Maryland, and where Hampton charged and captured the Federal artillery posted in the suburbs of Frederick City; the rearguard work as the Column hastened on, pursued by McClellan, to Sharpsburg; the stout fighting on the Confederare left there; the raid around McClellan's army in October; the obstinate fighting in front of the gap of the Blue Ridge as Lee fell back in November to the line of the Rappahannock; the expedition in dead of winter to the Occoquan—the critical and desperate combat on the 9th of June, 1863, at Fleetwood Hill, or Brandy, where Hampton held the right, and Young of Georgia, the brave of braves, went at the flanking column of the enemy with the sabre, never firing a shot, and swept them from the field; the speedy advance, thereafter, with the fighting, fighting, fighting, on the road to Gettysburg; the close and bitter struggle when the enemy, with an overpowering force of infantry, cavalry and artillery, about the 20th of June, attacked the Southern cavalry near Middleburg, and forced them back, step by step, beyond Upperville, where, in the last wild charge, when the Confederates were nearly broken, Hampton went in with the sabre at the head of his men and saved the command from destruction by his "do or die" fighting; the advance thereafter in Pennsylvania, when the long, hard march was strewed all over with battles like the verses of Arioste; the stubborn stand at Hanover town, where Hampton stood like a rock upon the hills above the place, and the never-ceasing receding roar of his artillery told us that on the right flank all was well; the march thereafter to Carlisle, and back to Gettysburg; the grand charge there, sabre to sabre, where Hampton was shot through the body, and nearly cut out of the saddle by a sabre blow upon the head, which almost proved fatal; the hard conflicts of the Wilderness, when General Grant came over in May, 1864; the fighting on the north bank of the Po, and on the left of the army at Spottsylvania Court House; the various campaigns against Sheridan, Kautz, Wilson and the later cavalry leaders on the Federal side, when Stuart having fallen, Hampton commanded the whole Virginia cavalry; the hot fights at Trevillian's; at Reams; at Bellfields; in a hundred places; when in those expiring hours of the great conflict a species of fury seemed to possess both combatants, and Dinwiddie was the arena of a struggle, bitter, bloody, desperate beyond all expression; then the fighting in the Carolinas on the old grounds of the Edisto, the high hills of the Santee and Congaree, which in 1864 and 1865 sent bulletins of battle as before; then the last act of the tragedy when Sherman came and Hampton's sabre gleamed in the glare of his own house at Columbia, fired by himself, and then was sheathed—such were some of the scenes amid which the late form of this soldier moved, and his sword flashed. The gleaming sabre had always been seen in the van. On the Rappahannock, the Po, the Susquehannah, the Shenandoah, the North Ann, the James, the Rowanty—in Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania—Hampton had fought with the stubborn courage inherited from his revolutionary sires. Fighting lastly upon the soil of his native State, he felt no doubt as Marion and Sumter did when Rowdon and Tarleton came and were met sabre to sabre. In the hot conflicts of 1865 Hampton met the new enemy as those *preux chevaliers* with their Virginia comrade, "Light Horse Harry" Lee, had met the old, in 1781.

Of this eminent soldier, I will say that seeing him often, in many of those perilous straits which reveal hard fibre or its absence, I always regarded him as a noble type of courage and manhood—a gentleman and soldier "to the finger-nails." But that is not enough; generalization and eulogy are unprofitable—truth and minute characterization are better. One personal anecdote of Cæsar would be far more valuable than a hundred commonplaces—and that is true of others. It is not a "general idea" I am to give—I would paint the portrait, if I can, of the actual man. The individuality of the great South Carolinian was very marked. You saw at a glance the race from which he sprung, and the traits of heart and brain which he brought to the hard contest. He was "whole in himself and due to none." Neither in physical or mental conformation did he resemble Stuart, the ideal cavalier, the rough rider Forest, or the rest. To compare him for an instant to the famous Stuart—the latter laughed, sang and revelled in youth and enjoyment. Hampton smiled oftener than he laughed, never sang at all that I ever heard, and had the composed demeanor of a man of middle age. Stuart loved brilliant colors, gay scenes, and the sparkle of bright eyes. Hampton gave little thought to these things, and his plain gray coat, worn, dingy and faded, beside the great cavalier's gay "fighting jacket," shining with gold braid, defined the whole difference. I do not say that the dingy coat covered a stouter heart than the brilliant jacket—there never lived a more heroic son than Stuart—but that in this was shown the individuality of each. The one—Stuart—was young, gay, a West Pointer, and splendid in his merriment, *elan* and *abandon*. The other—Hampton—a civilian approaching middle age, a planter, not a soldier by profession—a man who embarked in the arduous struggle with the coolness of the statesman, rather than the ardor of the soldier. It was the planter, sword in hand, not the U. S. officer, that one saw in Hampton—the country gentleman who took up arms because his native soil was invaded, as the race of which he came had done in the past. That the plain planter, without military education, became the great soldier, is an evidence that "the strain will show."

Here is an outline of the South Carolinian as he appeared in July, 1862, when the cavalry were resting after the battles of the Chickahominy, and he often came to the old shady yard of Hanover Court House, to talk with General Stuart under the trees there. What the eye saw in these days was a personage of tall stature and "distinguished" appearance. The face was browned by sun and wind, half covered by dark side-whiskers, joining a long moustache of the same hue—the chin bold, prominent and bare. The eyes were brown, inclining to black, and very mild and friendly; the voice, low, sonorous, and with a certain accent of dignity and composure. The frame of the soldier—straight, vigorous and stalwart, but not too broad for grace—was encased in a plain gray sack coat, of civilian cut, with the collar turned down; cavalry boots, large and serviceable, with brass spurs; a brown felt hat, without star or feather; the rest of the dress plain gray. Imagine this stalwart figure with a heavy sabre buckled around the waist, and mounted upon a large and powerful animal of most excellent blood and action, but wholly "unshowy," and a correct idea will be obtained of General Wade Hampton. Passing from the clothes to the man—what impressed all who saw him was the attractive union of dignity and simplicity in his bearing—a certain grave and simple courtesy which indicated birth and breeding. Here was evidently an honest gentleman who disdained all pretence or artifice. It was plain that he thought nothing of personal decorations or military show, and never dreamed of "producing an impression" upon any one. This was revealed by that bearing full of proud modesty—neither stiff nor insinuating—simple.

After being in his presence for ten minutes, you saw that he was a man for hard work, and not for display. That plain and unassuming manner, without pretension, affectation, or "official" coolness, was an index to the character of the individual. It is easy to tell a gentleman—something betrays that character, as something betrays the pretender. Refinement, good breeding, and fealty through all, to honor, were here embodied. The General was as courteous to the humblest private soldier as to the Commander in Chief, and you could discover in him no trace whatever of that air of "condescension" and "patronage" which small persons, aiming to be great, sometimes adopt. It was the unforced courtesy of the gentleman, not the hollow politeness of the pretender to that title, which all saw in Hampton. He did not act a tale, but lived his character. In his voice, in his bearing, in all that he said and did, the South Carolinian betrayed the man who is too proud not to be simple, natural, and unassuming.

Upon this trait of manner merely, I may seem to dwell too long. But it is not a trifle. I am trying to delineate a man of whom we Southerners are proud—and this rare grace was his. It reflected clearly the character of the individual—the noble pride, the true courtesy, and the high-bred simplicity of one who amid all the jarring strife of an excited epoch, would not suffer his serene equanimity of temper to be disturbed; who aimed to do his duty to his country, not rise above his associates; who was no politer to the higher than to the low, to the powerful than to the weak, and who respected more the truth and courage beneath the tattered jacket than the stars and wreath on the braided coat. The result of this kindly feeling toward "men of low estate" was marked. An officer long associated with him said to me one day, "I do not believe there ever was a General more beloved by his whole command, and he more than returns it. Gen. Hampton has a real tenderness, I do believe, for every soldier who has ever served under him." He was always doing the poorer members of his command some kindness. His hand was open like his heart. Many a brave fellow's family was kept from want by him; and a hundred instances of this liberality are doubtless recorded in the grateful memories of the women and children whom he fought for and fed, too, in those dark days. This munificence was no where else recorded. The left hand knew not what the right did.

I risk a few words more, at the risk of repetition. In reference to the personal bearing of the man. His composure upon trying occasions, as in every day life, indicated a self-poised and independent character. He rarely yielded to hearty mirth, but his smile was very friendly and attractive. You could see that he was a person of earnest feelings, and had a good heart. In camp he was a pleasant companion, and those who saw him daily became most attached to him. His staff was devoted to him. I remember the regret experienced by these brave gentlemen when Hampton's assignment to the command of all the cavalry separated them from him. The feeling which they then exhibited left no doubt of the *entente cordiale* between the members of the military family. General Hampton liked to laugh and talk with them around the camp fire; to do them every kindness he could—but that was his weakness toward everybody—and to play chess, draughts, or other games, in the intervals of fighting or work. One of his passions was hunting. This amusement he pursued upon every occasion—over the Spottsylvania, amid the woods of Dinwiddie, and on the rivers of North Carolina. His success was great. Ducks, patridges, squirrels, turkey and deer fell before his double-barrel, in whatever country he pitched his tents. He knew all the old huntsmen in the regions in which he tarried, delighted to talk with such upon the noble science of venery, and was considered by these dangerous critics a thorough sportsman. They regarded him, it is said, as a comrade not undistinguished, and sent him, in friendly recognition of his merit, presents of venison and other game, which was plentiful along the shores of the Rowanty, or in the backwoods of Dinwiddie. Hampton was holding the right of General Lee's lines there, in supreme command of all the Virginia cavalry; but it was not as a hunter of "blue-birds"—so we used to call our Northern friends—that they respected him most. It was as a deer hunter; and I have heard that the hard-fighting cavalier relished, very highly, their good opinion of him in that character. It is singular that a love for hunting should so often characterize men of elegant scholarship and literary taste. This great soldier and huntsman was also a poet; and one day Stuart spoke in high commendation of his writings. His prose style was forcible and excellent—in letters, and all that he wrote. The admirably written address to the people of South Carolina, which was recently published, will display the justice of this statement. That paper, like all that come from him, was compact, vigorous lucid, "written in English," and everewhere betrayed the scholar no less than the patriot. It will live when a thousand octavos have disappeared.

Such was Wade Hampton, the man—a gentleman of refinement, purity, and elevation in every fibre of his being. It was impossible to imagine anything coarse or profane in the action or utterance of the man. An oath never soiled his lips. "Do bring up that artillery!" or some equivalent exclamation, was his nearest approach to irritation even. Such was the supreme control which this man, of character [illegible] force, and resolution, had over his passions. For under that simplicity and kindly courtesy was the largely-molded nature of one ready to go to the death when honor called. In a single word, it was a powerful organization under complete control, which the present writer seemed to recognize in Wade Hampton. Under that meekness and dignity which made him conspicuous among the first gentlemen of his epoch, was the stubborn spirit of the born soldier.

Little space is left to speak of him in his military character. I preferred to dwell upon Hampton, the man, as he appeared to me—for Hampton the General, will find many historians. Some traits of the soldier, however, must not be omitted—this character is too eminent to be drawn only in profile. On the field, Hampton was noted for his coolness. This never left him. It might almost be called repose, so perfect was it. He was never an excitable man, and as doubt and danger pressed heavier, his equanimity seemed to increase. You could see that his was truly a stubborn spirit. I do not think that any body who knew him could even imagine Wade Hampton "flurried." His nerve was made of invincible stuff, and his entire absence of all excitability on the field was spoken of by his enemies as a fault. It was said that his coolness amounted to a defect in a cavalry leader; that he wanted the dash, rush, and impetus which this branch of the service demands. If there was any general truth in this criticism, there was in particular instances. Hampton was sufficiently headlong when I saw him—was one of the most thoroughly successful commanders imaginable, and certainly seemed to have a natural turn for going in front of his column with the drawn sabre. What the French call *elan* is not, however, the greatest merit in a soldier. Behind the strong arm is the very brain. Cool and collected resolution, a comprehensive survey of the whole field, and the most excellent dispositions for attack or defence—such were the supreme merits of this great soldier. I could never divest myself of the idea that, as a corps commander of infantry, he would have figured among the most eminent names of history. With an unclouded brain, a *coup d'œil* as clear as a ray of the sun; invincible before danger; never flurried, anxious or despondent; content to wait; too wary even to be surprised; looking to great trials of strength, and to general results—the man possessing these traits of character was better fitted, I always thought, for the command of troops of all arms—infantry, cavalry and artillery—than for one arm alone. But with that arm which he commanded—cavalry—what splendid results did he achieve! In how many perilous straits was his tall figure seen in front of the Southern horsemen, bidding them "come on," not "go on." He was not only the commander, but the *sabreur* too. Thousands will remember how his stalwart form towered in the van—at Frederick City, at Upperville, at Gettysburg, at Trevillian's, and in a hundred other fights. Nothing more superb could be imagined than Hampton at such moments. There was no flurry in the man—but determined resolution. No doubt of the result apparently—no looking for an avenue of retreat. "Sabre to Sabre!" might have been taken as the motto of his banner. In the "heady fight" he was everywhere seen, amid the clouds of smoke, the crashing shell, and the whistling balls, fighting like a private soldier, his long sword doing hard work in the melee, and carving its way as did the trenchant weapons of the ancient knights. This spirit of the thorough cavalier in Hampton is worth dwelling on. Under the braid of the Major-General was the brave soul of the fearless soldier, the "fighting man." It was not a merit in him or in others that they gave up wealth, business, elegance, all the comforts, conveniences and serene enjoyments of life, to live hard and fight hard; to endure heat, cold, hunger, thirst, exhaustion, and pain, without a murmer; but it was a merit in this brave soldier and gentleman that he did more than his duty, met breast to breast, in single combat, the best swordsmen of the Federal army, counting his life no more than a private soldier's; and seemed to ask nothing more than to pour out his heart's blood for the cause in which he fought. This personal heroism—and Hampton had it to a grand extent—attracts the admiration of troops. But there is something better, or more useful at least—the power of brain and force of character which won the confidence of the Commander-in-chief is called Robert E. Lee, it is something to have secured his high regard and confidence. Hampton had won the heart of Lee, and by that "noblest Roman of them all" his great character and eminent services were fully recognized. These men seemed to understand each other, and to be inspired by the same sentiment—a love of their native land which never failed, and a willingness to spend and be spent to the last drop of their blood in the cause which they had espoused. During General Stuart's life, Hampton was second in command of the Virginia Cavalry; but when that great cavalier fell, he took charge of the whole as ranking officer. His first blow was that resolute night attack on Sheridan's force at Mechanicsville, when the enemy were driven in the darkness from their camps, and sprung to horse only in time to avoid the sweeping sabres of the Southerners—giving up from that moment all further attempt to enter Richmond. Then came the long, hard, desperate fighting of the whole year 1864, and the spring of 1865. At Trevillian's, Sheridan was driven back, and Charlottesville saved; on the Weldon Railroad the enemy's cavalry, under Kautz and Wilson, was nearly cut to pieces, and broke in disorder, leaving on the roads their wagons, cannons, ambulances, their dead men and horses; near Bellfield the Federal column sent to destroy the railroad was encountered, stubbornly opposed and driven back before they could burn the bridges at Hicksford; at Burgess' Mill, near Petersburg, where General Grant made his first great blow with two corps of infantry, at the Southside railroad, Hampton met them in front and flank, fought them all an October day nearly, lost his brave son Preston, dead from a bullet on the field, but, in conjunction with Mahone, that hardy fighter, sent the enemy in haste back to their works, thus saving for the time the great war artery of the Southern army. Thenceforward, until he was sent to South Carolina, Hampton held the right of Lee, in the woods of Dinwiddie, guarding with his cavalry cordon the line of the Rowanty, and defying all comers. Stout, hardy, composed, smiling, ready to meet any attack, in those last days of the strange year 1864, he seemed to my eyes the beau ideal of a soldier. The man appeared to be as firm as a rock, as immovably rooted as one of the gigantic live-oaks of his native country. When I asked him one day if he expected to be attacked soon, he laughed and said: "No; the enemy's cavalry are afraid to show their noses beyond their infantry." Nor did the Federal cavalry ever achieve any results in that region until the ten or fifteen thousand crack cavalry of Gen. Sheridan came to ride over the two thousand men, on starved and broken-down horses of Gen. Fitz Lee, in April, 1865. From Virginia, in the dark winter of 1864, Hampton was sent to oppose with his cavalry the advance of Gen. Sherman, and the world knows how desperately he fought there on his *natale solum*. More than ever before, it was sabre to sabre, and Hampton was still in front. When the enemy pressed on to Columbia, he set his fine house there on fire with his own hands, and fell back, fighting from street to street, and so continued fighting until the thunderbolt fell in South Carolina, as it had fallen in Virginia, at Appomattox, and the struggle ended. The sword that Hampton sheathed that day was one which no evil of bad faith, cruelty or dishonor had ever tainted. It was the blade of a brave and irreproachable chevalier—of a man who, throughout the most desperate and embittered conflict of all history, had kept his ancestral name from every blot, and had proved himself upon a hundred battle fields the worthy son of the "mighty men of old."

Such, in rough outline, was this brave and kindly soldier and gentleman, as he dashed before our eyes in Virginia "working his work." Seeing him often—in camp, on the field, in bright days, and when the sky was darkest—the present writer looked upon him as a noble spirit, the truthful representative of a great and vigorous race. Brave, just, kindly, courteous, with the tenderness of a woman under that grave, at times almost cold exterior; devoted to the principles for which he fought and would have died; loving his native land with a love "passing the love of a woman;" proud, but never haughty; not so much "condescending" to men to low estate, as giving them—if they were soldiers—the warm right hand of fellowship; merciful, simple-minded; foremost in the fight, but nowhere to be seen in the ante chamber of living man; with a hand shut tight upon the sword hilt, but open as day to "melting charity;" counting his life as nothing at the call of honor; fighting with stubborn resolution for the faith that was in him; never cast down, never wavering, never giving back until the torrent bore him away, but fighting to the last with that heroic courage born in his blood, for the independence of the country. Such was Wade Hampton, of South Carolina. There are those, perhaps, who will malign him in these dark days, when no sun shines. But the light is yonder beyond the cloud and storm, some day it will shine out, and a million of rushlights will not be ample to extinguish it. There are others who will call him traitor, and look, perhaps, with pity and contempt upon this page which claims for him a noble place among the illustrious figures shining all along the coasts of history, like beacon lights above the storm. Traitor let it be—one hundred years ago there were many in the South, and they fought over the same ground. Had the old Revolution failed, those men would have lived forever, as Hampton and his associates in the recent conflict will. "Surrender," written at the end of this great history, cannot mar its glory—failure cannot blot out its splendor. Let the storm of bitter obloquy and insult beat—it will not be long. At least one fellow-traitor lives to share that obloquy, and take his portion of that "pitiless storm"—a poor writer, who is proud to have touched the brave hand of Hampton.